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NIE 11-15-82

## SOVIET NAVAL STRATEGY AND PROGRAMS THROUGH THE 1990s

Information available as of 19 October 1982 was  
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

Note: Leonid Brezhnev died on 10 November 1982, as this Estimate was going to press. We have not altered the text to take account of his death because our judgments call for a post-Brezhnev period of maneuvering at various levels in the political and military hierarchy. We believe that sharp changes in defense efforts would be possible only after power is consolidated.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

Over the past decade, the role of the Navy within the USSR's national strategy has continued to evolve, supported by additional operational experience and an ambitious naval construction program. This program, emphasizing larger ships with increased endurance and technologically advanced weapon and electronic systems, has enhanced the Navy's capability for sustained conventional combat and distant area deployments.

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Within the Soviets' overall wartime strategy, however, the primary initial tasks of the Navy remain:

- To deploy and provide protection for ballistic missile submarines in preparation for and conduct of strategic and theater nuclear strikes.
- To defend the USSR and its allies from strikes by enemy ballistic missile submarines and aircraft carriers.

Accomplishment of these tasks would entail attempts to control all or portions of the Kara, Barents, and northern Norwegian and Greenland Seas, the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk, and the Northwest Pacific Basin, and to conduct sea denial operations beyond those areas to about 2,000 kilometers from Soviet territory. We believe that virtually all of the Northern and Pacific Fleets' available major surface combatants and combat aircraft and some three-quarters of their available attack submarines would be initially committed to operations in these waters. Other initial naval wartime tasks are: support of ground force operations in the land theaters of military operations (including countering naval support to enemy operations in peripheral areas such as Norway), and some interdiction of Western sea lines of communication.

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We believe this wartime strategy will remain essentially unchanged over the next 15 to 20 years. Strategic strike—including protection of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)—and strategic defense against enemy SSBNs, aircraft carriers, and other major platforms capable of striking Soviet territory will continue to be the Soviet Navy's primary initial wartime tasks. We expect these requirements—particularly the need to counter Western units armed with the new Tomahawk land attack cruise missile—will drive the

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Soviets to expand the area in which their Navy would initially deploy the bulk of its Northern and Pacific Fleet forces for sea control/sea denial operations—possibly out to 3,000 kilometers from Soviet territory.

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A principal portion of the strategic defense task—the destruction of enemy SSBNs before they can launch their missiles (SLBMs)—will pose increasing difficulties for the Soviets. The deployment of hard-target-capable US SLBMs, improved British and French SSBNs, and the first Chinese SSBNs probably will increase the importance of this task. The Soviet Navy's ability to detect and track US SSBNs in the open ocean, however, probably will decline, at least over the next 10 years. This is primarily because we believe that the increased patrol areas of SSBNs carrying Trident SLBMs will more than offset the increased coverage that could be provided by improved Soviet antisubmarine warfare (ASW) platforms. We therefore expect that Soviet naval anti-SSBN operations will continue to be modest, with a relatively few attack submarines stationed in choke points or in the approaches to Western or Chinese submarine bases. (s)

We believe that Soviet procurement of naval weapons platforms and systems over the period of this Estimate will be driven primarily by requirements stemming from the strategic offensive and defensive tasks outlined above:

- The size of the modern ballistic missile submarine force will probably remain roughly constant at about 60 units throughout the 1990s. In the absence of new arms control restrictions, the number of SLBM warheads is likely to increase.
- The Soviets will develop long-range nuclear-armed land attack cruise missiles capable of being launched from a variety of naval platforms. In the absence of arms control restrictions, we believe they will be deployed primarily on newer nuclear-powered attack submarines for use in theater strike roles and possibly for strikes against some targets in the continental United States.
- The first unit of a new class of nuclear-powered aircraft carrier probably will become operational by about 1990.
- The number of principal surface combatants probably will decline somewhat, but the trend toward larger average size, greater weapon loads, and more sophisticated weapon and electronic systems will continue.

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- The overall number of general purpose submarines will decline, but the number of nuclear-powered units probably will grow substantially.
- The Navy's overall amphibious lift capability will increase gradually. We expect an increase in the size of the naval infantry from some 14,000 to about 18,000 to 20,000 men.
- One or more new classes of underway replenishment ships will be introduced, but construction of such ships probably will continue to receive a relatively low priority.
- The number of fixed-wing naval aircraft probably will increase somewhat, with the major change being the first at-sea deployment of high-performance, conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) aircraft. The continued production of Backfire bombers and the introduction of a follow-on in the 1990s will be an essential element in the Soviets' attempts to expand their sea control/denial efforts against Western surface forces in vital areas such as the Norwegian, North, and Mediterranean Seas and the Northwest Pacific Basin. Naval Aviation bombers will also remain a principal feature of Soviet antisurface capabilities in other areas such as the Arabian Sea.
- Major technical improvements in Soviet fleet air defense are likely. New surface-to-air missiles, guns, and laser weapons will probably be introduced. Fighter aircraft operating from the projected new aircraft carriers will add a new dimension to the Navy's air defense resources.
- Expansion of both sea control and sea denial operations will be supported by gradual improvements in Soviet capability to surveil Western surface units and provide targeting assistance for antiship missiles. Much of the improvement probably will involve space-based systems. ☐

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In addition to its wartime tasks the Soviet Navy will continue to play important peacetime roles, ranging from routine show-the-flag port visits to support for distant-area client states during crisis situations and limited wars. Given the likelihood of continued instability in the Third World, the use of such naval diplomacy and power projection techniques probably will increase during the 1980s and 1990s. ☐

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The most notable change in the Soviet Navy during the period of this Estimate probably will be the introduction of its first aircraft

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carriers equipped to handle high-performance CTOL aircraft. We believe that the primary mission of such carriers will be to help expand Northern and Pacific Fleet sea control operations during a general war. The carriers will also give the Soviet Navy for the first time an ability to project power ashore effectively in distant areas in a limited war. Together with other force improvements, they will provide the Soviets the option of using naval force in a number of Third World situations against all but the most well-armed regional powers. We believe that major Soviet Navy task force participation in Third World conflicts would, however, be restricted to limited war situations in which the Soviets judged the risk of escalation to war with the United States or NATO to be small [ ]

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Our best estimate on the future of the Soviet Navy reflects our judgment that the trends we have observed in ship construction, naval doctrine, and strategy over the past 20 years will continue. Among the variables that could dictate a different course for the Soviet Navy of the 1990s are:

- A major ASW breakthrough that gives the Soviets the capability to detect and track enemy submarines in the open ocean. Although unlikely throughout the period of this Estimate, such a breakthrough would substantially increase the Navy's ability to perform the critically important strategic defensive task of destroying enemy ballistic missile and land attack cruise missile submarines before they launched their missiles. It would probably lead to major changes in the way the Soviets would deploy their general purpose naval forces before and during general war.
- Arms control negotiations, which could play an important part in determining the role within Soviet strategy and the force composition of the Soviet Navy in the 1990s. For example, severe restrictions on sea-launched cruise missile characteristics and/or deployment would alleviate a serious maritime threat to the USSR and eliminate much of the pressure to conduct sea denial operations at greater distances from Soviet territory.
- Severe economic problems, which could lead to a reduction of Soviet defense spending in the 1990s. Such a reduction would be likely to result in cuts in the Navy's budget, perhaps falling heaviest on major surface ship programs such as the expected new aircraft carrier, projected nuclear powered cruisers, and large amphibious and replenishment ships. The net result of

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such cuts would be a navy with less capability than the one projected in our best estimate to control waters beyond the range of land-based tactical aircraft and to project power in distant areas. Programs considered essential to the Navy's primary strategic offensive and defensive tasks—such as ballistic missile submarines, attack and cruise missile submarines, land-based strike aircraft, and ASW-oriented surface combatants—probably would suffer few, if any, cuts.

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